Exploring Factors Related to Benefits of Social Media Marketing (SMM): An Opinion of Selected Hotels of North India

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ABSTRACT

Marketing activity is associated with buying and selling of any product or service. After Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (L.P.G) the entire prospective of buying and selling has become very challenging & to remain competitive in today's cut throat competition social media marketing has emerged an effective tool for marketer. The hospitality & tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors and is always adaptive to the new technologies. Currently it accounts approximately 10.2 percent of the Global GDP and in India it account 9.6 percent of the Indian GDP (WTTC, 2016). India is one of the fastest growing economies of the world, due to rapid development the usage of internet has also grown many folds over the years this is also visible from IAMAI-IMRB report (2016), clearly depicts that internet usage, which was 137miilion in 2012 in urban India, has jumped to 462 million in year 2016. On the other hand in rural India, internet usage was 111 millions in 2012 & has augmented to 426 millions in the year 2016. The usage of internet has open new doors for Indian as a result they have become more adaptive to modern technologies. This implies to hospitality & tourism sector too. This is foreseen, that adaption of technology exclusively internet, social media and mobile applications in the tourism and hotel sector has increased in India for marketing and sales and building and managing relations with current and prospective customers. The present paper tries to explore various factors of social media marketing in Indian hotel industry keeping the hotelier perspective in mind.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Media Marketing, Hotels, North India.

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism & Hotel industry has always been the foremost adaptor of new technologies. Tourism stakeholders were always on keen side exploring the potential of ICTs to enhance tourism experience (Neuhofer B.et al, 2013). Table 1 clearly shows that the modern hotel industry has adapted to computer related technology at very initial stages.

Table 1: Technology Adoption by Hotels over the Years

| Year	Adoption of new technology in hotels	Year	Adoption of new technology in hotels
1881	Electric lights	1983	Electronic key cards Credit cards
1910	Electricity	1986	In room telephone
1927	In room radio	1990s	Computers and Internet reservations
1940	Air conditioning	1994	Hotel website (Hyatt) Online hotels catalog (Travelweb.com)

Year	Adoption of new technology in hotels	Year	Adoption of new technology in hotels
1950	Electric elevator	1995	Real time online bookings
1958	In room television	2003	Hotels started offering WiFi
1964	Centralized reservation system	2007	Hotels started using Social Media for Marketing
1970s	Point of sale (POS) system and keyless lock Standard Colour Television Electric cash register	2012	First mobile hotel application (app) Hotels started using Ipads and tablets
1980	Property management system	2016	The world's first robot hotel opens in Japan (Henn-na Hotel)

Source: Bardi James A. (2007), Hotel Front Office Management (4th edition), John Wiley & Sons Inc. and Intelitycorp.com

From the above table 1, it is clear that hotels introduced Centralized reservation systems (CRS) way back in 1964. Whereas, the computers & internet usage was started in 1990 & social media in 2007. This clearly reflects that hotel always want to remain competitive & customer oriented and new technology plays an important role in delivering quality services to hotel customers. As over the years, there is a drastic change in social behavior of humans. In today's competitive environment, people don't find time to meet & interact with each other. For fast communication the evolution of internet took place & this has opened a new golden gate for people and business: social media is its best example (Lu et al, 2010). Social media helps in connecting themselves with social networking sites through which now people can stay far and yet remain connected. Researches show that almost fifty percent of internet users make use of internet to access their social media accounts. Social media can be defined as ''a group of internet based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content'' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). McDonald (1996) divided the Internet users as ''avid adventurers,'' ''fact collectors,'' ''entertainment seekers,'' and ''social shoppers.''

In India, Internet penetration in society has been remarkable over the years. This is visible from the figure 1 which clearly highlights the internet usage in urban & rural India.

Figure1: Internet usage in urban and rural India (in millions)
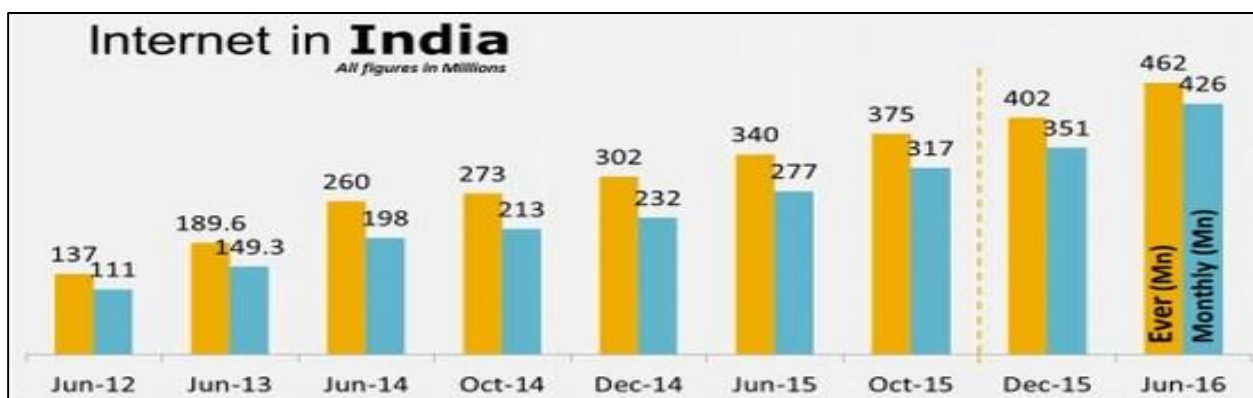
Source: IAMAI-IMRB report (2016)

From the above figure1, it is clear that the internet usage in India has taken a drastic jump be it urban or rural. As it clearly indicate that in 2012 the internet usage was 137 million in urban India, which surged impressively 462 million in the year 2016. Same trend is visible in rural India also where the internet usage was 111 million which has reached 462 million by the year 2016. This distinctive aspect of social media and its massive popularity have revolutionized the marketing practices such as advertising and promotion industry (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Internet and social media changed consumer behavior in terms of gathering relevant information for product/ service, their providers and customer feedback in pre purchase & feedback and suggestions in post purchase phase (Mangold & Faulds, 2009,Ross et al., 2009; Laroche et al., 2012). Social media carries its own advantages as it helps connect businesses to consumers, expand and foster those relationships in beneficial ways (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media marketing (SMM) offer special values to business, such as improved brand recognition (De Vries, Gensler &c Leeflang 2012), facilitating electronic word-of-mouth (Chen et al. 2011), increasing sales (Agnihotri et al. 2012), information share in business context (Lu et al, 2010) and generating social support from consumers (Ali 2011; Ballantine & Stephenson 2011). In addition, the networking of people through social media creating virtual brand community share values and trust, leading to a positive impact over business (Wu et al. 2010). Social media or web 2.0 in tourism industry is termed as tourism 2.0 (travel 2.0) and same used by hospitality (hotels, restaurants etc) called hospitality 2.0.

In Tourism & Hotel Industry, early tour operators, travel agents & hotels used print media (newspaper, broacher and billboards) for business marketing. Since then, this media (print) of mass outreach is serving the businesses (tourism and hospitality) and called traditional media. Later, broadcast media (telephone, radio and television) were also added to this. But as the technology advances, the broadcast media was internet (World Wide Web) a read only mode & termed as web 1.0 web. Where web 1.0 was limited to 'read only', web 2.0 gave birth to 'writing and participating web' that lead to user interaction and content contribution. Web 2.0 is more popularly called 'social media', which simply means websites and applications that enable users to create and share content to participate in social network. Weinberg & Pehlivan (2011) tries to differentiate in Traditional & Web 2.0. This can further be understood from table 2, which clearly shows the difference between traditional & social marketing.

Table 2: Key Differences between Traditional and Social Media Marketing

MEDIA	Traditional	Social
Mode	Radio, FM, Television, Print, Billboard etc.	Social networks, microblogs, communities etc.
Spend	Cash, cost	Investment, social currency, trustworthiness, transparency and authenticity
Delivery	Direct from marketer	From source
Objectives	Awareness, knowledge, recall, purchase etc.	Conversation, sharing, collaboration, engagement etc.

Source: Weinberg & Pehlivan (2011) Media Process Elements.

From the above table 2, it is clear that in terms of media, spend, delivery & objective the social media (web 2.0) is extremely effective.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Over the years, globally, number of researchers tries to explore the association, impact & importance of social media on tourism & hospitality industry.

Business in social media (2008), a study fact sheet revealed that more than 50 percent of consumers (American) feel better connection and better served by those companies that were active and using social media. This study fact sheet also confirmed social media as best way to interact with customers generates customer feedback and customer service being online. Robin B. Dipetro, Tena B. Crews, Cathy Gustafson and Sandy Strick (2009) referred some previous researches illustrated that many hospitality businesses specially those indulged in dinning operations were at beginning stage to start utilizing social media considering its unique marketing aid. In India, scenario also falling place with most accommodation and food and beverage service businesses already adopted these means viz. social media, mobile operating system based mobile applications, mobile friendly websites and other. Ruggless, R. (2010) finds it a two way online interaction as it makes customer warmer and more intimate.

A research conducted by Quirk's Marketing Research media (2011) finds that today small and medium business investors (other than hospitality sector) have also understood the pivotal role of social media in business and were confident about ROI on marketing through various social platforms. Further it suggests that 64 percent of business get influenced by social media. Deloitte (2015) expressed that travel and hospitality decision making process worldwide was going under blanket of social media storm and thus offering both threats and opportunities. Confident, empowered and techno savvy travelers is the new breed that holds 'key to communication with brands and other consumers'. Further it adds that brands who consistently maintain their brand promise would benefit and success as spotlight will be flashed to them over social media. Amadeus technology (2013) research stated that social networks and mobile technology usage increased in India and also revealed that social media is used by 40 % of business travelers and 25 % leisure travelers. Further, it suggests

that there is an expected 10 % increase in travelers accessing social media. Though numbers of studies were conducted globally but in India, very few studies have been conducted. The present paper tries to explore the role of social media marketing in Indian hotel industry with focus on north India keeping the view of hoteliers

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The data for research paper was collected from five State's capital of North India viz. Jammu (summer capital of Jammu & Kashmir), Shimla, Chandigarh, New Delhi and Jaipur. The data was collected from chain and non chain hotels. Total count of hotels participated in this research was 100 i.e.20 samples of hotels from each state capital were taken. The sample distribution can also be understood from figure 2 & table 3.

Figure 2: Distribution of sample cities
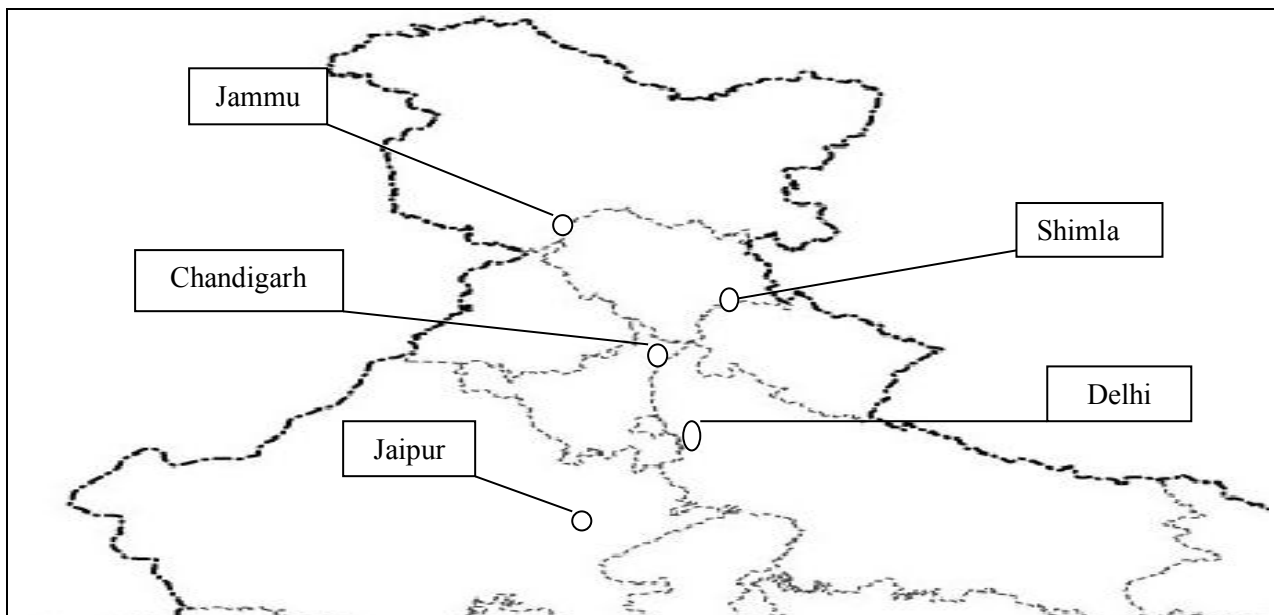
Source: author creation

Table 3: Hotel's category - state wise participated in this research

State Capital	Budget	Heritage	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star	Total
Jammu (summer capital)*	6	1	4	6	3	20
Shimla	8	1	5	5	1	20
Chandigarh (Tricity)	5	-	4	4	7	20
New Delhi & NCR	3	-	4	4	9	20
Jaipur	4	5	3	3	5	20
Category wise total	26	07	20	22	25	100

Table 3 shows participation of hotels of different categories from respective research universe.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Hotels:
This study was conducted on hotels situated in Jammu, Shimla, Chandigarh, New Delhi and Jaipur. In total, 47 chain and 53 independent hotels participated in this research, out of which were five star 25, four star 22, three star 20, budget 26 and heritage 07. The count was 20 hotels of varies category from respective states. Most hotels started using social media after 2011 and top trending social media platforms among hotels are facebook, tripadvisor, twitter and Online Travel Agencies (OTA) like Hotels deals and review sites such as trip advisor along with Online Travel Portals/ Agencies viz. booking.com, Make My Trip (MMT) etc. were added and used as social media websites as most of them also offer customers to review hotels they stayed in and in some researches OTA's were also termed as social media sites and hotels preferred to include them in the questionnaire to be responded in the initial stage of the research called as pilot study.

Table 4: Demographic profile of hotels

Variable	Sub variable		Frequency	Valid percent
Hotel category	Budget		26	26.00
	Heritage		7	7.00
	3 Star		20	20.00
	4 Star		22	22.00
	5 Star		25	25.00
Type of Hotel	Chain Hotel		47	47.00
	Non Chain Hotel		53	53.00
Hotel in City	Jammu		20	20.00
	Shimla		20	20.00
	Chandigarh/ Tricity		20	20.00
	New Delhi/ NCR		20	20.00
	Jaipur		20	20.00
Since how long, hotel using Social Media	2008		3	3.00
	2009		1	1.00
	2010		6	6.00
	2011		29	29.00
	2012		12	12.00
	2013		15	15.00
	2014		21	21.00
	2015		13	13.00
Type of Social Media	Facebook	Yes	100	100.00
		No	00	0.00
	Twitter	Yes	66	68.8
		No	30	31.2
	LinkedIn	Yes	33	61.1
		No	21	38.9
	Google plus	Yes	38	58.5
		No	27	41.5
	You Tube	Yes	22	100.0
		No		
	Instagram	Yes	31	100.0
		No		
	Blogs	Yes	3	5.6
		No	51	94.4
	Booking.com	Yes	23	100.0
		No		
	Trip Advisor	Yes	69	100.0
		No		
	Hotels.com	Yes	24	100.0
		No		
	MakeMyTrip	Yes	84	100
		No		
	Any other	Yes	65	100.0
		No		
Designation of Respondent(s)	General Manager/ Resident Manager		36	36.0
	Marketing Manager		43	43.0
	Others		21	21.0

From the above table it is clear that year 2011 has become as milestone for social media as most of the hotels started using that for marketing. Face book and trip advisor acclaimed wide acceptance followed by twitter, Google plus and Instagram. Marketing managers were handling social media accounts in most hotels. This would be apparent from given responses by hotel marketers.

Opinion of Hotel Marketing Managers' on Different Aspects of Information Shared Over Social Media to Aid Customers:

Based on secondary data various variables related to information sharing by hotels over social media were identified. The analysis is presented in table 5. Respondents were asked questions on 5 point likert scale. Factor analysis method is used to reduce these variables to limited number of factors. The analysis is done with the help of Principal Component Analysis and Varimax Rotation Matrix. 14 variables were identified based upon secondary researches on hotel information shared over social media for customers. The output of Principal Component Analysis shows 4 values are more than 1, thus reducing 14 variables to underlying 4 factors. These are given hereunder:

Factor 1: Hotel reputation, customer loyalty and hotel's impressive architecture

Seven variables were found in this factor. These are hotel reputation (.723), hotel online rating, review on review sites (.624), hotel's existing customer's feedback (.405), hotel's impressive architecture (.506), social community friend's recommendation (.694), hotel's loyalty and reward program (.518) and display of membership (.536). Digital marketers consider these as prime factors.

Factor 2: Location advantage and effective display of services information

Three variables were found in this factor, which are hotel location (.614), hotel's service visuals (.509) and hotel's product and services information (.867). All researches on social media agree that these factors play pivotal to serve customers' decision making.

Factor 3: Hotel promotions

Two variables were found in this factor, which are hotel promotion (.803) and hotel's product visuals (.715). Marketing gurus reflect on these factors as leading online customer aids.

Factor 4: Hotel's tariff and discounts

Two variables were found in this factor, which are tariff and budget offered by hotel (.577) and discounts on booking offers (.806). This serves equally to classes and masses.

Table 5: Hotel information shared over social media for customer

Hotel Information shared over social media for customers by hotel	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Reputation	.723			
online rating & reviews on review sites	.624			
Existing customers feedback on hotel services on SM pages	.405			
impressive architecture & ambience	.506			
Social media friend's recommendation	.694			
Loyalty & reward programs	.518			
Display of membership & benefits	.536			
Location		.614		
Services visuals		.509		
Products and services information		.867		
Promotion (Promos)			.803	
Product visuals.			.715	
Tariff & budget (package) offered by hotel				.577
Discounts on booking offers				.806

Thus, we can conclude that top variables with their cumulative percentage are hotel reputation, online rating & reviews on review sites, existing customer's feedback on hotel services on SM pages and existing customers' feedback on hotel services on social media pages were responded by 60 percent of the population.

Social Media Marketers Opinion on Benefits of Social Media that Attract Consumers to follow any Hotel (Brand) Over Social Media:

In all thirteen variables were identified as benefits in hotel marketers' view that attract customers most to follow any hotel (brand) over a few social media channels. These variables were identified based upon secondary researches. . Respondents were asked questions on 5 point likert scale. Factor analysis method is used to reduce these variables to limited number of factors. The analysis is done with the help of Principal Component Analysis and Varimax Rotation Matrix. The output of Principal Component Analysis shows 3 values are more than 1, thus reducing 13 variables to underlying 3 factors. These are as follows:

Factor 1: Customer's experience, expectations sharing and direct access to hotel's higher authorities. Four variables were found in this factor. These are to know what existing customers feel and share about that hotel/ hotel chain (.697), best way of self expression and individual identity as hotel customer (.716), opportunity for customers to instantly deliver the message to the people in authority (.846) and an opportunity for customers to express their stay experience (.884). These are top benefits social media offers to existing consumers of both standalone and chain hotels.

Factor 2: Effective hotel information sharing and mental satisfaction due to excellent service. Four variables were found in this factor. These are to get regular updates (.795), quick access to the information shared by the hotel (.686), to satiety their sense of association with the hotel that offered excellent services (.833) and mental satisfaction to acknowledge and ascertain the hotel and its services that the guest is planning to use in near future (.525). These features make communication complete i.e. two way communications between hotels and consumers.

Factor 3: Hotel Discounts and other benefits. Five variables were found in this factor. These are to get updates of hotel's discounts and offers (.781), to get updates of hotel's extended services for their valued customers (.723), to avail their chance to win through participating in hotels' online contests (.636), opportunity for customers to express their expectations to be incorporated in their next visit or for other customers (.657) and medium of entertainment (.706). These benefits makes complete package of benefits that lures prospective and existing consumers.

Table 6: Marketers opinion on benefits prospective consumers seeks in hotel's posts shared over social media

Benefits of customers	Component		
	1	2	3
To know what other existing customers feel and share about your hotel/ hotel chain	.697		
Best way of self expression & individual identity as hotel customer	.716		
Opportunity for customers to instantly deliver the message to the people in authority (hotel)	.864		
Opportunity for customers to express their stay experience	.884		
Prospective customer gets regular hotel updates		.795	
Quick access to the information shared by the hotel		.686	
To satiety their sense of association with the hotel that offered excellent service		.833	
Mental satisfaction to acknowledge and ascertain the hotel and its services that the guest is planning to use in near future		.525	
To get updates of hotel's discounts & offers			.781
To get updates of hotel's extended services for their valued customers			.723
To avail their chance to win through participating in hotel's online contests			.636
Opportunity for customers to express their expectations to be incorporated in their next visit or for other customers			.657
Medium of entertainment			.706

Therefore, from the above analysis we can understand that top benefits with their cumulative percentage are to get regular hotel updates, best way of self expression & individual identity as hotel customer and an opportunity for customers to instantly deliver the message to the people in authority were responded by 68 percent of the total population.

Opinion of Marketer on Purpose of Using Social Media By Hotels:
In all nine variables were identified to discover the purpose of using social media by hotels. These variables were identified based upon secondary researches. . Respondents were asked questions on 5 point likert scale. Factor analysis method is used to reduce these variables to limited number of factors. The analysis is done with the help of Principal Component Analysis and Varimax Rotation Matrix. The output of Principal Component Analysis shows 3 values are more than 1, thus reducing 9 variables to underlying 3 factors. These are given hereunder:

Factor 1: Creating positive image by sharing various information
Seven variables were found in this factor. These are disseminating new information about hotel's products and services (.724), share positive feedback given by customers (.739), uploading videos and write ups everything concerned with the hotel (.647), getting instant feedback about hotel's products and services (.600), organizing

contests (.747), through discounts and offers (.544) and last but not least passing information about corporate social responsibility (CSR) of the hotel (.688). These ensures reflecting positive image is the minds of hotel's fan following.

Factor 2: Customer trust. Only one variable was found in this factor and that is retaining customer's trust (.657). This is one of the leading reason marketers turn to social media.

Factor 3: Cost control. Only one variable was found in this factor and that is controlling in hotel's marketing cost (.810). This is one of the advantages various researches argue and marketers speak for social media that it has lowered their cost but amplified output.

Table 7: Purpose of using social media by hotels

Variable	Component		
	1	2	3
Disseminating new information about Hotel's products & services	.724		
Share positive feedback given by customers	.739		
Uploading videos & write-ups everything concerned with the hotel	.647		
Getting instant feedback about hotel's products & services	.600		
Organizing contests	.747		
Through discounts and offers	.544		
Passing information about corporate social responsibility of hotel	.688		
Retaining customer's trust		.657	
Controlling in hotel marketing cost/budget			.810

Therefore, from the above analysis, it is clear that the key purpose of using social media for hotel marketers is disseminating new information about Hotel's products & services, share positive feedback given by customers and uploading videos & write-ups everything concerned with the hotel was responded by 62 percent of the research population.

CONCLUSION:

Verma M. (2018) research conducted on 15 hotels in New Delhi held that Social Media Marketing (SMM) impact on hotels is by means of magnetize new customers, sustain existing consumers, to improve their online presence and reflection, to boost their public relations viz. to know customer's preferences and behavior and facilitate with customer relationship management. The objective of present study is to explore various factors related to social media marketing which includes hotel features, benefits and purpose. The present study is conducted on hotel social media marketers. From the study it is clear that when it comes to different aspects of information shared over social media to aid customers- four factors representing 60 percent of the population these are hotel reputation, customer loyalty and hotel's impressive architecture, location advantage and effective display of services information, hotel promotions and last hotel's tariff and discounts. When it comes to benefits of social media marketing to hotels, 68 percent of the total population agreed to three factors which are customer's experience, expectations sharing and direct access to hotel's higher authorities, second factor is effective hotel information sharing and mental satisfaction due to excellent service and last hotel discounts and other benefits. Further, when it comes to top purpose of using social media, 62 percent of the population agreed to creating positive image by sharing various information, customer trust and cost control. Though the present study is just confined to northern region state capitals of India and hence carried on limited population. In wider context to the length and breadth of the country the research results would have been more impressive. Further, more detailed study with larger sample size, with large range of variables and/or in any other region of country may also be carried out to effectively represent the intrinsic research. A comparative study on hotels & customers opinion can also be carried out to get both perspectives.

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